

Dead Bird Submission Instructions for Local Agencies
California West Nile Virus (WNV) Dead Bird & Tree Squirrel Surveillance Program
California Department of Public Health (CDPH)
Division of Communicable Disease Control

January 20, 2010

Dead Bird and Tree Squirrel Reporting and Submission Instructions for Local Agencies

When your agency receives a call from the public about a dead bird (especially recently dead crows, ravens, magpies, jays, or raptors) or dead tree squirrel, or one of your staff finds a dead bird, please immediately refer them to the **CDPH WNV and Dead Bird Hotline at 1-877-968-BIRD (2473)**.

The Dead Bird Hotline is monitored **8am - 5pm, 7 days a week**. CDPH will assess the suitability of the dead bird or tree squirrel for testing and contact your agency only if the carcass is approved for pickup. Any carcasses sent without prior notification will not be tested.

Only agencies listed under the permit issued to CDPH from the California Department of Fish & Game are authorized to pick up dead birds and tree squirrels. The agencies covered include local mosquito abatement districts, environmental health departments, and other designated agencies.

Members of the public may salvage dead birds found on their property or place of residence. **The public must first call the Dead Bird Hotline and obtain a Dead Bird Number**; a corresponding public salvage submission form will then be faxed to the appropriate agency. The public will be instructed by the hotline staff to double-bag the carcasses and drop them off at the designated agency within 24 hours, between 9 am - 3 pm, Monday – Friday, and **only in areas where local agencies are not picking up dead birds** (e.g., closed zip codes), unless otherwise requested by the local agency. **Note: only dead birds may be brought in by the public to local agencies for shipping. We discourage public salvage of all squirrels because ground squirrels, which could be infected with plague, may be confused with tree squirrels.**

weblinks: [bird and tree squirrel ID chart \(pdf\)](#) [tree squirrel surveillance Q&A \(pdf\)](#)

Once the submission is approved, your agency can ship the carcass to the California Animal Health & Food Safety laboratory at UC Davis (CAHFS Central). CAHFS Central will then remove specific tissues and forward the samples to the UC Davis Center for Vectorborne Diseases (CVEC) for WNV testing. Shipping and testing expenses will be paid by CDPH. Carcasses are considered **Category B, Biological Substances**. This replaces the old designation, “Diagnostic Specimen”.

To ensure the carcass arrives at CAHFS in a testable condition, to protect your safety, and to comply with shipping regulations, please follow these instructions:

- Only dead birds and tree squirrels can be picked up under our permit.
- Wear rubber or latex gloves when handling all carcasses. If gloves are not available, use a plastic bag -- turned inside out -- over your hand and invert the bag to surround the carcass. Do not touch a carcass with bare hands.
- **Collect fresh carcasses.** Badly decomposed or scavenged carcasses are of limited diagnostic value. Signs that a bird or squirrel has been dead for too long (over 24-48 hours) are the presence of maggots, an extremely lightweight carcass, missing eyes, skin discoloration, skin or feathers that rub off easily, strong odor, or a soft, mushy carcass.
- **If upon pick-up the carcass is found to be unacceptable (e.g. a species your agency or CDPH is not accepting or a badly decomposed specimen), please collect the carcass, double-bag it, and dispose of it in a secure garbage can or dumpster.** California Department of Fish & Game prefers that you burn or bury the carcass, but disposing of it in a dumpster is also acceptable. **Please call CDPH immediately and notify us that the animal will no longer be submitted.**
- Place each carcass into two sealed (zip-locked) plastic bags. **Double-bagging prevents cross-contamination and leakage. There should always be two bags separating the carcass from shipping documents.**
- Enclose the shipping documents into a SEPARATE ZIP-LOCK BAG. The primary shipping document is a copy of the dead bird submission form which contains the dead bird number and which is located on the Surveillance Gateway or faxed by CDPH. CAHFS prefers that you put this separate zip-lock bag inside the outer bag containing the dead bird or squirrel.
- **Pack the carcass with blue ice packs.** Please **limit the number of ice packs** to the number required to keep the carcass fresh, as the weight of extra ice packs add to the shipping charges. In accordance to shipping regulations, an absorbent material such as newspaper must be included in the box to prevent any leakage.
- Ship the carcass in styrofoam cooler placed in a cardboard box. Unprotected styrofoam containers cannot be shipped without an outer box or container, as they may break into pieces during shipment. **Contact GSO directly to arrange for carrier pickup Monday through Thursday; this guarantees arrival at CAHFS before the weekend.**
- Contact **GSO** to pick up carcasses at **1-800-322-5555**. Our shipping account is **22971** and our zip code is **94804**.
- Carcasses that need to be stored for an extended time period (over 2 days) should be put on dry ice or stored at -70°C. If it is not possible to store carcass at -70°C, a carcass may be stored at 0°C (regular freezer) for a short period of time.

Refrigerating the carcass is recommended for **overnight storage only** (this slows virus deterioration, but does not stop it).

- CDPH will provide prepared shipping boxes with appropriate labels. Any empty boxes shipped to you from CDPH will have its caution labels covered by sheets of paper with “EMPTY BOX” printed on them. Please discard this sheet of paper before using the box to ship out a dead bird. If you need additional boxes, please contact **Jaynia Anderson at (510) 412-6251**.
- Once agencies past the yearly proficiency panel, agencies may test corvids via VecTest or RAMP assays. Results can be entered directly into the Surveillance Gateway, please **enter results by 4:00pm Friday of each week to have results included in reports for the following week’s State WNV updates. Note: any positive bird must be disposed of as biomedical waste (incineration).**

Dead Bird Shipping List

Please verify that your agency has the following items:

- CAHFS Address (see below)
- GSO preprinted labels
- WNV hotline number (877-968-BIRD; manned 8am - 5pm, 7 days a week)
- Crumpled newspapers or another absorbent material
- Rubber or Latex Gloves
- Packing tape
- Dead Bird Shipping Boxes
 - inner zip-lock bag
 - outer zip-lock bag
 - inner styrofoam box
 - outer cardboard box
 - blue ice packs

California Animal Health & Food Safety (CAHFS) laboratories:

CAHFS Central (530) 754-7372

ATTN: WNV

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